CHILD PROTECTION INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

The Catholic Schools Office promotes an absolute commitment to the safety, welfare and well being of all children, particularly those attending the Catholic schools of the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle.

“Protecting children is one of our most sacred trusts.”

(Bishop Bill Wright, 2012)

Diocesan schools comply with a range of state legislation designed to protect children, including:

- The Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998
- The Ombudsman Act 1974 (Part 3A)

There are also key Church guidelines that promote the protection of children, including:

- Towards Healing: Principles and procedures in responding to complaints of abuse against personnel of the Catholic Church in Australia (2010)
- Integrity in the Service of the Church: A Resource Document of Principles and Standards for Lay Workers in the Catholic Church in Australia (2011)

The Catholic Schools Office has specific policies and standards to heighten the protection of children, including:

- The Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle Reporting Child Protection Concerns Policy
- Child Protection Code of Professional Standards for Catholic School Employees

In 2005 the Diocese established a centralised, expert child protection team, now known as the Diocesan Child Protection Unit, which oversees child protection practices in all Catholic schools in the Diocese, as well as providing a range of preventative services and responding to allegations of abuse.

You can contact the Diocesan Child Protection Unit on (Ph. 4979 1390), or find out about it at: http://www.mn.catholic.org.au/bishop/dcppcu.htm

PREVENTION IN DIOCESAN SCHOOLS

Screening

Catholic Schools Office work with agents of the Commission for Children and Young People and require any person who are the preferred candidates for employment in schools, to undertake a pre-employment screening process known as the Working with Children Background Check.

NSW law also require schools to request any volunteer who is engaging in an activity with children in school, during which the volunteer may be unsupervised at any time, to make a statutory declaration known as the Student/Volunteer Declaration. This means that parents or family members will be asked to sign such a Declaration if they wish to be involved as a volunteer with the children in our schools.

A prohibited person cannot volunteer or work in our schools. The Diocesan Child Protection Unit keeps a record of all volunteer declarations.

All self-employed persons who work with your children in Diocesan schools (e.g. specialist tutors) are required to have and provide a copy of their Certificate for Self Employed People to the school, which verifies its authenticity through the Commission for Children and Young People.
Training

The Catholic Schools Office requires that all permanently employed staff complete a full day of child protection training presented by the Diocesan Child Protection Unit. Casual staff are required to complete a half-day training course. Further, principals and assistant principals provide regular child protection updates and reminders as part of the schools in-service training and professional development.

In terms one and two of 2012 the Catholic Schools Office and the Diocesan Child Protection Unit provided a full day refresher in child protection for all Diocesan schools.

RESPONSE IN DIOCESAN SCHOOLS

Reporting

Staff in Diocesan schools are mandatory reporters. This means they are lawfully required to report to the Community Services Helpline if they have reasonable grounds to suspect a child is at risk of significant harm from abuse or neglect and those grounds are identified in the course of, or from the person’s work. Also the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle Reporting Child Protection Concerns Policy obliges all members of the Diocese to report any child protection concerns to their supervisor or Principal to be assessed as possible risk of significant harm reports to the Helpline.

The Diocesan Child Protection Unit and School Principals will contact NSW Police if they believe a criminal act has occurred.

As parents of children attending a Diocesan school you are encouraged to discuss any child protection concerns you have with your school’s principal. If you believe the matter is not being addressed appropriately, you have the right to contact the Diocesan Child Protection Unit to discuss your concerns.

As parents you also have the right to report your concerns to the Community Services Helpline or NSW Police at any time you believe it necessary.

Investigating

All allegations of child abuse or neglect are taken seriously by the Diocese.

Where the alleged conduct involves a person associated with Catholic Schools Office or a Diocesan school, including employees and volunteers, then the allegations are investigated at a level commensurate with the seriousness of the allegations.

Where an alleged conduct is minor, the Principal of the school, oversighted by the Diocesan Child Protection Unit, may undertake a local investigation. Where the alleged conduct is more serious, a trained investigator from the Diocesan Child Protection Unit will conduct the investigation. This may involve oversight by the NSW Ombudsman.

When there is an allegation made a thorough risk assessment is conducted and appropriate safety measures are put in place.

If your child is a witness or otherwise involved in such an investigation, the Diocesan Child Protection Unit will contact you as the parent, explain what is happening and request your permission to interview your child. The Diocesan Child Protection Unit prefers to interview your child at home with you present.

Child protection investigations are confidential. As parents you will only be advised of an investigation or the outcome of an investigation if there is a legitimate need to know.